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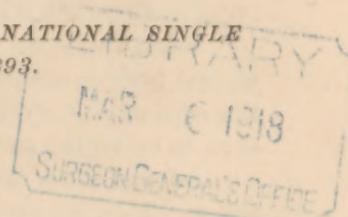
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RELATION OF THE SINGLE TAX TO PUBLIC HEALTH

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RELATION OF THE SINGLE TAX TO PUBLIC HEALTH

The province of the physician is primarily to care for the welfare of the body only, to minister to the physical nature of his fellows—his aim being to palliate and remove, if possible, those conditions of the mortal framework which, by their varied expression, constitute the symptoms of the several and manifold diseases falling under medical observation.

The full realization of the scope and sphere of professional effort and duty must impress upon the consciousness of every thinking physician the fact that man is simply a land animal; that he comes from the earth and returns to the earth, drawing from that exhaustless store-house, directly or indirectly, everything that goes to sustain life, confer comfort and give to him physical sustenance and enjoyment.

The Indian chieftain recognized the true physical relations of man when he said the sun was his father, the earth his mother, for every constituent or element that enters into the upbuilding and maintenance of the physical frame is drawn from the earth; everything that supports it during life comes from the same source; and, in the end, it is “earth to earth”—man “rests his head on the lap of earth” to sink into and be mingled forever with his mother clay.

Here, then, we have the status of man in so far as the animal body is concerned; the law of his vital necessities and the law of gravitation equally forbid his leaving the earth, even if he willed so to do.

As this is the law of his natural being, man’s right to use the earth in the satisfaction of his physical wants cannot be gainsaid, and the exercise of this inborn right is only abridged or limited by the similar equal right of every other human being.

But the encroachment upon this underlying natural right and law has progressed to the point that now the common heritage of all mankind in the earth is virtually denied, and land is held as private property by the few, and the fee therein escheated into the hands of monopoly and special privilege through corrupt or ill-considered legislation, or other means whereby the unscrupulous and powerful seize and hold a mortal advantage over their fellows, who are naturally of equal desert.

The evils of this abnormal condition of affairs are most apparent where population is thickest, that is in cities, and a potential serfdom attends this situation which has to the land-master this advantage over the slave-master that, whereas, it is to the pecuniary interest of the latter to keep his human chattels in a healthy condition in order to reap from the exercise of their powers of production the largest possible returns, the former knows no such interest or obligation, but may covertly wield nearly absolute powers over health and life conferred through the error of legislation in classing land as property, and thus giving to the few the opportunity of acquiring a prescriptive dominion over the birthright of all.

The sanitary mischief that may attend and flow from the exercise of this unnatural power is most serious, and the problems set before the physician and public health official are most grave and difficult—so grave and difficult, indeed, that it may be boldly affirmed they are insoluble while the present system of land holding continues.

Palliative measures that seem for the time effective have been, and are, and may continue to be, used, but no true remedy for the crying wrongs against human health and life as seen in every city can be found until the course of legislation is retraced, and our laws relating to land are recast in accordance with the dictates of fundamental right and justice.

The statistics of many large cities now show that, through the force of present laws operating on land, the massing and herding together of human populations over considerable municipal areas is such that, exclusive of street and other common spaces, there is not room enough for the occupants to recline on the earth if the buildings were removed, that is, there is no decent burial room in the ground beneath for those who dwell upon the surface.

Amidst such conditions all the plagues and scourges that most vex and destroy the human race find congenial lodgment, if indeed they are not there begotten and bred to epidemic proportions. Tuberculosis in all its varied forms, diphtheria, scarlet fever and all the other fevers that weaken and waste health and life are at home in the tenements and it is one of the inevitable righteous judgments following violations of natural law that infections born and fostered in the slums may strike and slay most swiftly the children of the palace.

Adults do not escape the ravages of filth diseases thus begotten, and it has recently been well said of cholera that it "comes in the name of the King of Terrors to compel from purple and fine linen, and sumptuous fare a trembling recognition of their mortal brotherhood with nakedness and starvation and pitiful squalor."

Harm can come to wrong-doers only when justice is done and the right bears sway, and in the readjustment of social conditions, which must follow the application of the single-tax in its fullest meaning, may be foreseen by him who will, a physical regeneration of the race gradually brought about and the attainment of an improved state of general health, impossible now, with the iron forces of selfish privilege and land monopoly concentrating population as never before and pressing neighbor against neighbor until the "crowded warrens of the poor," through the greed of landlordism rise to eight or ten or more stories in height above the surface of the earth.

The clutch of the land-master, benevolent though he be, can only be broken through the application of the principles declared by Henry George in words so plain that the commonest understanding may grasp their meaning; and these forbid the speculative holding of land, and compel the return to the community of the rental value of all land used, and in this way, that which at first may seem to be only a moral or economic proposition becomes a potent sanitary factor; for, inevitably, with the opportunity presented to every family to possess a home of their own the fever nests and dens of disease now fostered in slums and tenements would be deserted, and this dispersal of population would enable public-health men to so control the spread of infection that many now familiar forms of disease would cease, and disappear as factors in mortality.

To this conclusion have I come as the result of years of experience in diversified medical and sanitary work. To me there is no other solution possible—the true remedy is within our reach if we are but wise enough fearlessly to apply it.

" 'Tis evidence so full—if the last trumpet sounded in my ear,
Undaunted, I should meet the saints half way,
And in the face of Heaven maintain the fact."

—The Weekly Courier, St. Louis, Dec. 28, 1893.